

REVIEWS

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LOCALIZING MODERNITY IN ASIA: A REVIEW

CONTEMPORARY ASIAN MODERNITIES: TRANSNATIONALITY, INTERCULTURALITY, AND HYDRIDITY. Edited by Yiu-Wai Chu and Eva Kit-Wah Man. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2010, 318 pp., ISBN 978-3-0343-0093-3, US\$ 81.95 (Hardback).

CULTURAL BARRIERS TO THE SUCCESS OF FOREIGN MEDIA CONTENT: WESTERN MEDIA IN CHINA, INDIA, AND JAPAN. By Ulrike Rohn. Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang, 2010, 427 pp., ISBN 978-3-631-59430-8, US\$ 93.95 (Hardback).

There is now a growing awareness among scholars that modernization in Asia was shaped by the preexisting traditions of governance and development. Since the late nineteenth century, China confronted the challenge of the West and underwent a painful process of reforms and revolutions. In Meiji Japan, the reformers succeeded in appropriating Western concepts and practices to modernize the country. In British colonies in Asia, the ruling elites integrated indigenous cultural elements into the mechanisms of domination and control, and imposed their vision of modernity over the local populations. Therefore, different historical experiences generate different reflections on the juxtapositions of tradition and modernity. Against this backdrop, two recently published books shed new light on such interactions in modern Asia.

Contemporary Asian Modernities emerged from an international conference at Hong Kong Baptist University in 2006. This collection of essays discusses the transmission, reception, and appropriation of capitalist modernity in Greater China. All 13 essays address the following questions: How can we conceptualize modernity from a uniquely Asian perspective? How was the Western notion of modernity integrated into the existing political, social, economic, and cultural order? In what ways did local visions of modernity differ from those of the West? The editors and contributors as such highlight the various Chinese understandings of modernity in different temporal and spatial contexts.

In the introduction, Yiu-Wai Chu and Eva Kit-Wah Man emphasize the complicated relations between culture and modernization and call on scholars to explore the impacts of indigenous traditions of governance on the modernizing process. The four essays in part one analyze the transmission of global modernity in modern China. According to Arif Dirlik, many postcolonial states have developed their own colonial ambitions under the pretext of nationalism and globalization. For example, the Chinese socialist state has appropriated the neoliberal ideology of capitalism to consolidate its authoritarian rule from within and expand its influence abroad. Mark Elvin points out that since the nineteenth century Western modernizing forces had turned the Chinese world upside down. Many intellectuals rejected Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, and traditional karmic justice,

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but they failed to reconcile scientism and pragmatism with indigenous cultural values. Ricardo K. S. Mak discusses a paradigmatic shift of the Chinese world history curriculum from a tool of Marxist ideological propaganda into an academic subject that promotes neoliberal economic reforms. Through a textual analysis of several Chinese popular novels, Ping-Hui Liao asserts that the novelists in question opposed the suppression of gender equality, racial autonomy, and class consciousness in the modernizing process.

Part two looks at the localization of Western modernity in Hong Kong and Shanghai. Timothy Man-Kong Wong draws on Philip C. C. Huang's concept of biculturality to evaluate the history of Chinese activism in British colonial Hong Kong. Since Chinese elites were excluded from taking part in colonial rule, they advantaged themselves by using Christian missionary resources to build the University of Hong Kong and various public medical institutions. This pattern of activism was driven by their genuine concern for the well-being of fellow Chinese and their discontent with colonial rule. Allen Chun examines the rise of crony capitalism in Hong Kong after 1997 when corporate interests and government bureaucrats formed an oligarchy to monopolize the political, social and economic decision-making process. Following the same line of reasoning, Yiu-Wai Chu criticizes Hong Kong's Chief Executive Donald Yam-Kuen Tsang for privatizing public institutions, pursuing short-term economic growth, and ignoring the interests of ordinary people. The chapter by Amy Lee investigates the representations of Shanghai in Wang Anyi's novels. As with Hong Kong, Shanghai is a cosmopolitan society with an interesting mixture of Chinese and Western features. Eva Kit-Wah Man draws attention to the rise of Confucianism in contemporary China and comments that its authoritarian and hierarchical tendencies are detrimental to women's rights.

The interaction between tradition and modernity is discussed in part three. Robbie B. H. Goh regards many Asian leaders' obsession with technological modernity as dehumanizing, unstable, and anti-intellectual. When Singapore set out to make the city-state a technological hub in Southeast Asia, the government refused to loosen its ideological control of the cultural sphere and liberalize the society. Wai-Luk Lo reviews the changing paradigms of Hong Kong drama in the late twentieth century and shows that the artists responded as much to pressures of British colonialism as to ideological and political struggles in Maoist China. Matthew M. Chew presents a fascinating study of nightclub culture in urban China and reveals that clubbers have integrated Asian and Western musical elements to create a hybrid nightlife culture for themselves.

As with many conference proceedings, the interpretative framework of this work is quite problematic. Most contributors look at the development of Chinese modernity from the perspectives of government officials and intellectuals. How the modernizing discourses of individualism, nationalism and feminism have been absorbed into the everyday life of ordinary people remains unclear. Explaining how ordinary Chinese received, adapted and transformed different notions of Western modernity to empower themselves requires a closer look at the specific circumstances in which such interactions took place. This issue is best illustrated in the latest research on the politics of marginalization and resistance and the rise of material culture in China (Cheung, Lee & Nedilsky, 2009; Zarrow, 2006).

By comparison, *Cultural Barriers to the Success of Foreign Media Content* concentrates on the complicated relations between transnational media, local consumers, and national governments in China, India and Japan. Written in the format of a doctoral dissertation, this book presents an in-depth analysis of the political, legal, commercial, and cross-cultural barriers to the operation of transnational media enterprises in these countries. Comprised of 13 chapters, the first 7 chapters review the latest scholarly literature on global media production and consumption. Chapters 8, 9 and 10 form the core of this study and evaluate book publishing, magazine publishing, and television programming in different Asian contexts. The last three chapters analyze the empirical findings from a cross-cultural perspective.

Drawing on extensive interviews with senior executives and media producers, Ulrike Rohn investigates the adaptation of different business strategies by major media corporations in expanding into the Chinese, Indian and Japanese markets. The overall structure of the book guides readers from the arrival of global media players in these countries to discuss the local consumers' interests and their governments' media policies. This study has gone beyond the latest work by Anthony Y. H. Fung (2008) on state-media relations to address the importance of local publishers, program producers, and consumers in appropriating transnational media cultural products. Rohn presents rich qualitative and quantitative data and illustrates conceptual insights with concrete examples. She gives those unfamiliar with media development in these Asian countries a sense of its shape, dynamics, and change in the early twenty-first century.

A major strength of Rohn's work is the comparative approach that she uses to conceptualize the changing relations between transnational media players and local recipients in different cultural contexts. Rohn reveals a regionally differentiated picture of such interactions. Compared with India and China, Japan is the most developed market for book publishing, magazine publishing, and television production. Although there are no legal barriers to the transnational companies, the level of cultural barriers is extremely high. Japanese consumers are far more interested in their own cultural products than imported ones. International publishers and program producers therefore need to integrate Japan-related themes into their products. Otherwise, they cannot compete with local publishers and television programs. As with Japan, India has no legal barriers to the import of books, magazines, and television programs, but linguistic and cultural barriers pose a challenge. Despite the large English-speaking population, transnational media players not only need to be very sensitive towards specific religious communities but also translate their products into different regional languages. The media situation is more politicized in China, where international publishers and media producers face serious legal and political barriers to enter the market. But driven by material rewards and business incentives, these corporations have collaborated with Communist authorities and designed their cultural products according to the state's agendas. As long as the companies avoid controversial political subjects and localize their intensive marketing strategies, they can always reach out to a wider Chinese audience.

In short, the edited book by Yiu-Wai Chu and Eva Kit-Wah Man provides some stimulating case studies of the localization of modernity in Greater China, while Ulrike Rohn's work adds an inter-Asian dimension to understanding the impact of political, social and cultural structures on the operation of global media in Asia. Two important lessons can be drawn from these books. First, the early twenty-first century has become a period of political and economic leveling in which many Asian states have effectively used Western scientific and technological modernity to strengthen themselves. Second, Asian politicians, media producers, intellectuals, and ordinary people are active agents in this transformation. They have embraced new technologies and media products from the West to empower themselves individually and collectively.

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